

Protect Our Scarce Water Resources From Oil Pollution

National Water Week, which takes place from 16-22 March, is an important time to focus on preventing the pollution of our water sources, which are severely threatened by sewerage, plastics, fertilizers, motor oil and other chemicals.

Of the many sources of contamination that could end up making their way into our dwindling water resources, one is used motor lubricant oil, a common by-product of mechanised processes in all industry sectors. South Africa generates over 120 million litres of used oil in a year alone. This hazardous substance, contaminated by heavy metals and chemicals that are harmful to the environment and our health, is often dumped down drains and onto the ground, where it can make its way into our rivers and ground water. The ROSE Foundation (Recycling Oil Saves The Environment) is putting out a call during National Water Week for South Africans to be vigilant when it comes to used oil and for generators of used oil to store and recycle their used oil responsibly.

Water contamination threatens already dwindling water resources

“The water infrastructure in many South African towns and cities is already challenged, and pollution of rivers is a massive problem as sewage and other contaminants seep into ground and litter is washed into rivers from surrounding areas,” says Bubele Nyiba, CEO of ROSE.

Nyiba explains that because of its harmful properties, used oil is classified as a hazardous waste and is strictly governed by environmental laws - with its storage and disposal needing to meet the requirements of the Waste Act.

“The ROSE Foundation has been championing the responsible collection and removal of used oil for proper recycling since 1994. Due to a lack of education many South Africans who generate used oil may dispose of it improperly and illegally – pouring it down drains, into landfills, throwing it out onto the ground, or re-using it as a dust suppressant, burner fuel, or wood preservative.”

The ROSE Foundation drives recycling on behalf of the motor lubricants industry in an effort to keep used oil out of the environment. Nyiba says they have been successful but more needs to be done: “We have recycled 1,5 billion litres of used oil over the last 26 years – that’s a massive amount of used oil that could have ended up in our ground water.”

ROSE offers some practical tips on what to do with used oil:

- Drain oil into a clean container with a tight fitting lid, such as a reusable combination drain pan/storage container. Use a specially designed plastic ROSE Sumpy to collect and store used oil in.

- Empty oil containers and drums make effective makeshift storage vessels for used oil, however, DO NOT use a container that previously held chemicals, such as cleaners, solvents, fuels, paint or bleach.
- Always clearly label the container “Used Motor Oil.”
- Keep these containers in a place that can be accessed by a ROSE registered used oil collector and keep the surrounding area clear and clean. Ideally store them under cover and away from heat or sources of ignition.
- Keep oil change pans free of water and ensure your storage containers are tightly sealed and covered to protect them from rain water. Oil that is contaminated with water is far more difficult to recycle.
- Ensure that you do not mix used oil with other fluids such as antifreeze, transmission fluid, petrol, diesel etc. Mixing them may make them non-recyclable as well as very hazardous and flammable.
- Build a bund wall around bulk used oil storage tanks so that in the event of a spill or leak, the used oil will be contained. In the event of an oil spill, contact your used oil collector.

Once your container is full you can drop it off at your nearest approved municipal garden refuse site – a list of which is available from the ROSE Foundation. Otherwise, most reputable service centres have used oil storage facilities and will take your oil, as they are paid according to volume by the collectors who take it away for processing.

For those South Africans who may not directly generate used oil, the ROSE Foundation asks that you question the service station where you have your car serviced to find out what they do with their used oil. “Ensure you use a reputable service centre that properly stores their used oil for removal by a registered collector.”

Nyiba says that the safe disposal of hazardous waste has become a critical issue in South Africa in order to protect our environment. “The legislation in place in South Africa means that responsible waste management is no longer a nice thing to do but a necessary thing to do.”

For more information and to find out about an accredited collector or drop-off point, contact the ROSE Foundation on (021) 448 7492 or visit www.rosefoundation.org.za.